

Ozark

National Scenic Riverways



Superintendent Bill Black

Monday, May 26, 2014

Riverways Reflections

With the Memorial Day weekend, summer activity at Ozark National Scenic Riverways is in full swing. We are excited to announce that Round Spring Cave is open this summer for tours, after being closed in 2013 due to the sequester budget reductions. Tours began on May 24 and will be held daily at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. until Labor Day. If you are unable to get to Round Spring Cave for a tour this summer, we hope to be able to offer a "virtual tour" of the cave in the not-too-distant future. Our Resource Management staff is working with the Cave Research Foundation on a video project that we hope will provide an opportunity for folks to enjoy some of the scenery of Round Spring Cave from the convenience of their computers. Round Spring Cave is a wonderful tool to help us educate the public about caves and the issues that threaten their sensitive resources, like the spread of white-nose syndrome in bats.

In my last column I talked about the preservation work and improvements that will be completed on Alley Mill over the summer. Things are progressing as planned, with workers using a large lift to work on the side of the mill facing Alley Spring. They are replacing the roof, repairing the siding, and beginning to scrape and repaint. We will have a ranger stationed near the mill for the summer to assist visitors and answer questions. This week I want to highlight some future plans for the Big Spring area.

The Big Spring Dining Lodge and rental cabins were a mighty undertaking of the Civilian Conservation Corps, and then the Works Progress Administration, from 1934-1942. They represent one of the most impressive collections of Depression-era work projects in the state of Missouri. The lodge and cabins, along with associated structures and landscaping features, were constructed in a rustic architectural style using local materials like hand-hewn timber and stones that were quarried just a couple miles from Big Spring. Today, that rustic charm is very appealing to visitors, even though the buildings have begun to show signs of serious deterioration. Routine maintenance and repairs have been completed over the years, but major upgrades have not taken place in several decades and the condition of the buildings is beginning to suffer.

In 2015 we plan to begin several restoration and rehabilitation projects throughout the Big Spring area. Historic architects have evaluated the structures and made recommendations for preservation of the stone and timber construction. The buildings will undergo a variety of improvements, such as stabilizing the foundations, upgrading electrical and plumbing, restoring the stonework and timber construction, replacing fixtures with period-correct replicas, and adding some modern conveniences. This restoration is critical, not only for visitor enjoyment, but also for the preservation of these unique cultural resources.

We plan to upgrade the utilities throughout the area and establish a single underground utility corridor that will eliminate the unreliable overhead lines. The failing plumbing and sewage systems will be replaced at that time. Our hope is to finish off the work with a makeover for the entire landscape, which would include repairing landscape features like the trails, stairs, and boat dock. New decking was installed on the current boat dock this past month so that it can be used this season.

Through these improvements to the buildings and surrounding landscape, we hope to restore the former glory of the Big Spring area. We envision working with the Big Spring Lodge concession operator to enhance the recreational opportunities available, such as the return of the once popular johnboat tours, additional hiking trails, the potential for a camp store, and new exhibits and programs.

Ozark National Scenic Riverways preserves the free-flowing Current and Jacks Fork Rivers, the surrounding natural resources, and the unique cultural heritage of the Ozark people. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/ozar or Facebook.

Comments? Write to:

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Riverways Reflections (*continued*)

We anticipate that the Big Spring Dining Lodge and rental cabins will be closed for an extended period of time, beginning in 2015, in order to complete these extensive upgrades. I understand the disappointment that some may experience when these much-loved structures are unavailable during renovations, but I feel the benefits of the preservation and improvements will be worth the wait. During this time Big Spring, the nearby picnic shelters, and the Big Spring campground (which is newly repaved and opened on Memorial Day weekend) will remain open for visitors.

For more information about the work planned at Big Spring or any other activities at Ozark National Scenic Riverways, call park headquarters at (573)323-4236. You can also visit the park website at www.nps.gov/ozar. In addition, we regularly post updates about park activities and events on our park Facebook page. We are proud to boast that our Facebook page outshines all other National Park Service river parks in the number of posts, likes, and visits on a regular basis. Check it out – it's a great place to see what's happening at the park, especially with all the special activities planned this summer for our 50th anniversary!

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